THE

CIRCULAR LETTER

OF THE

Elders and Meſſengers

OF THE SEVERAL

BAPTIST CHURCHES,

Meeting at *Aulceſter*, *Bourton*, *Birmingham*, *Bromſgrove*, *Bridgenorth*, *Bewdley*, *Hooknorton*, *Middleton-Cheney*, *Perſhore*, *Sutton*, *Tewkeſbury*, *Upton*, *Warwick*, and *Worceſter*, met in ASSOCIATION at *Tewkeſbury*, on *Monday* and *Tueſday* in the *Whitſun-Week*, 1763, *maintaining the great Doctrines* of three equal Perſons in the God-head; eternal and perſonal Election; the original Guilt and Depravity of Mankind; particular Redemption; free Juſtification by the imputed Righteouſneſs of Chriſt; efficacious Grace in Regeneration; *and* the final Perſeverance of the Saints.

To the ſeveral Churches they repreſent, earneſtly wiſhing that they may be bleſſed, with all ſpiritual Bleſſings, in *Chriſt Jeſus*.

Beloved Brethren,

AT ſundry Times and in divers Manners, you have been ſpoken to from theſe our Annual Meetings; and many Things, which have been the Fruit of ſincere, and warm Deſires to do you Good, have been laid before you; but we fear our Succeſs, has come far ſhort, of our Prayers and Wiſhes. You

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have had Line upon Line, and Precept upon Precept; but, alas! have they not been received with too much Indifference, and almoſt loſt in Oblivion?

But notwithſtanding all paſt Diſcouragements, we would in Dependance on Divine Aid, make another Attempt to advance the beſt Intereſt of your precious Souls. Oh! that they may proſper and be in Health, that they may grow in every Grace, and increaſe in the experimental Knowledge of Chriſt Jeſus. We wiſh you may be more abundantly transformed into the Image of God, have ſweet Fellowſhip with him upon Earth, and be abundantly meetned, for the full Enjoyment of him in Glory. Theſe are the grand Deſigns of all the Divine Purpoſes, and the whole Conduct of God towards his People; and any thing that can be mentioned, as calculated to advance them, calls for the moſt ſerious and diligent Attention.

And in the firſt Place, we earneſtly recommend it to you, to pay a ſteady Regard to the Doctrines of our holy Religion. It is not a Matter of Indifference (as ſome ſuppoſe) what our Faith is, ſo that our Morals are good, and our Converſation regular, and decent; for we are deeply convinced by Experience, and Obſervation, that juſt and right Principles have the moſt powerful Influence to purify the Heart, and adorn the Life with the Beauty of Holineſs; and it is undoubtedly our indiſpenſable Duty, with Zeal tempered with Chriſtian Meekneſs, to contend for the Faith once delivered to the Saints, and ſtrive together for the Truths of the Goſpel.

The Sublime Doctrine of the Trinity, that there are three equal Divine Perſons in the God-head; that the Love of God is eternal, free, and peculiar; that Men came into the World Guilty and depraved; that

Chriſt

Chriſt will certainly ſave thoſe for whom he laid down his Life; that a Sinner is juſtified by his imputed Righteouſneſs; and that where God begins a good Work, he will carry it on, 'till the happy Subject thereof is compleat in Glory; are Sentiments which We embrace and recommend, not to gratify a party Spirit, or out of any Inclination, merely, to differ from others, but becauſe we are convinced by the unerring Word of God, that they are *faithful Sayings, and worthy of all Acceptation.*

Beg of God to enable you to *adorn the Doctrine of God our Saviour*, by an amiable and lovely Deportment, and an holy Life and Converſation. This will be the moſt effectual way to convince Men, and make them believe, that you are indeed the People of God, and your Religion is from Heaven; which they will not be apt to do, if you entertain Chriſtianity, as a mere ſpeculative Science, and are not *zealous to maintain good Works.* Endeavour therefore by fervent Prayer, and diligent Reading the holy Scriptures, to know your Duty to God, and to all Men, as you are Members of civil and religious Society; and endeavour to diſcharge them, as Perſons under the higheſt Obligations, to Univerſal Holineſs, and Goodneſs. And if you ſhall be enabled ſo to do, you may, thro' the Merits of Chriſt, hope for increaſing Comfort, and a more unſhaken Perſuaſion, of your Title to *the Inheritance of the Saints in Light: For to him that ordereth his Converſation aright, ſhall be ſhewn the Salvation of God.* Therefore dear Brethren, we intreat you, not only for the ſake of Chriſt, and his precious Intereſt, but alſo for your own ſake, that you will give due Attention to that excellent Summary of Duties, recommended by the Apoſtle *Paul* to the Philippians, *Whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever*

ſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report; if there be any Virtue, and if there be any Praiſe, think on theſe Things.

Deſirous of the ſame ineſtimable Benefits our ſelves, We would urge it upon you, to *wreſtle* hard with God; to have more of the Life and Power of Religion in your Souls; greater nearneſs to him; and ſweeter Fellowſhip with him. Graceleſs Men may go far, but not ſo far as this; they are not eagerly bent upon entring into the *Secret* of God's preſence; they *thirſt* not for holy Communion with him, nor any *Spiritual* Enjoyment of him: But where true Grace is, it tends towards God as its proper Centre, and diſpoſes the Chriſtian, unleſs it is under decays, to long and pant for God, and to *follow hard after him:* Oh! yield to theſe heavenly Propenſities, guard againſt every thing which may abate their Vigour, and reſt not ſatisfied, till you feel, that God draws near to you, and enables you, to *rejoyce in Hope of his Glory.*

The Exerciſes of Religion are often attended with Fatigue of Body, and a Waſte of the animal Spirits; and public Worſhip can't be kept up without ſome Expence: Is it not great Pity then, *to labour and ſpend your Money, for that which profiteth not? Taſte therefore and ſee that the Lord is good,* ſeek *Acquaintance* with him as your Covenant God, and to be filled with the Love of Chriſt, and the Conſolations of the holy and bleſſed Spirit.

Theſe Attainments will animate your Souls to practiſe Holineſs with Diligence and Pleaſure; you will be naturalized and ſuited to ſpiritual Things, and *run the Way of God's Commandments with* growing *Delight*; and indeed it is in a great Meaſure the want of theſe pleaſing Experiences, which occaſions that

Decay

Decay of the Power and Practice of true Godlineſs, which is ſo univerſally viſible in the Profeſſors of the preſent Age; for celeſtial Comforts oil the Wheels of the Soul, and make it *like the Chariots of a willing People*; when on the other Hand, if it has no ſpiritual Felicity, it drags on heavily, and greatly faulters in the Paths of Duty.

And it may abundantly contribute, to obtain theſe excellent Advancements in real Piety and Happineſs, to maintain a conſtant, and firm Reliance, on the Grace, and ſufficient Atonement, of our bleſſed, and exalted Saviour; to get the Heart weaned from the preſent World; to be frequent in ſecret Prayer and Meditation; to keep an Eye upon the Frame and Temper of your Minds; and to guard againſt all outward Temptations; and never preſume to offer any Violence to the Light, and juſt Dictates of your Conſciences; for the holy Spirit has a delicate Senſe, and is oftentimes ſoon provoked to ſuſpend his chearing, and Heart purifying Influences; for which Reaſon, the Apoſtle *Paul* ſays, *Grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are ſealed unto the Day of Redemption.*

We beſeech you in the Bowels of Chriſt, not only to appoint, but to be preſent at Prayer Meetings as often as poſſible; and you who are furniſhed with Abilities, for that profitable Work, give not your Miniſters or fellow Chriſtians the Trouble, by repeated Importunities, to drag you to ſo neceſſary, and important a Duty. May the Lord diſpoſe your Hearts at all proper Seaſons, to promote ſpiritual and experimental Converſation, which Multitudes of gracious Souls, have found extreamly pleaſant and advantageous. And ſhould you ſee in any Perſon, of good and pious Behaviour, a Gift for public Uſefulneſs

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in the Church of God, we desire that such may have all due Encouragement; that when we shall be removed by Death, our Places may be filled up with able, and faithful Labourers, in the Lord's Vineyard.

It grieves our Hearts to think, that there is occasion, from the visible abuse of sacred Time, to reprove for taking unnecessary Journeys, and doing forbidden and unlawful things, upon the *Lord's Day*, which will not fail of injuring your holy Profession, and impoverishing your Souls.

And let not your Ministers have reason to complain, of your neglecting the Worship of God on the Morning of the Lord's Day, which is too much the Case; nor of your late, and untimely attendance on the Services of his House; and remember that you are under indispensable Obligations, to keep up the due Exercise of Religion in your own Families.

We doubt not dear Brethren, but that some of you are deeply affected with us, in observing many, who constantly hear the Gospel preached, and pressing Exhortations to a holy Life, exceed Numbers, who have not the like Advantages, in gross and scandalous Immoralities; may we not fear, that these are distinguished Objects of the divine Displeasure, and unless Sovereign Grace prevents, peculiar Vengeance will follow such Abusers of Gospel Light, to the Regions of eternal Darkness.

From a Conviction that all Endeavours to advance Religion, will prove ineffectual, without Communications of Grace from Christ; and the down pourings of the blessed Spirit of God, We recommend Days of Fasting, Prayer, and Humiliation; and if these needful Exercises are duly attended to, We may

hope

hope, that God will *revive his Work in the midſt* of *theſe Years* of Declenſion.

As to the State of the Churches, tho' we find ſome Complaints, yet bleſſed be God, in the general they are in Peace, have the Goſpel in its Purity preached to them, and the Ordinances duly adminiſtred. Nineteen have been added by Baptiſm this Year, and thirteen removed by Death, ſome of whom quitted this World, with much Honor and Comfort.

We can't cloſe without intreating you to cheriſh upon your Minds, a deep Senſe of divine Goodneſs, in putting an end to a long, chargeable, and extenſive War; and reſtoring to theſe Realms, a Peace truely honorable and advantageous; and our gracious and excellent King, by whoſe Wiſdom and Conduct, under God, we enjoy this valuable Bleſſing, ſhould be greatly endeared to us all, on the account hereof.

Now our Lord Jeſus Chriſt himſelf, and God even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlaſting Conſolation and good Hope thro' Grace, comfort your Hearts, and eſtabliſh you in every good Word and Work.

We reſt your affectionate Brethren and Servants in the Bonds of the everlaſting Goſpel.

Sign'd *May* 25th, on the behalf of the whole Aſſembly, by the Moderator

JOHN ASH.

MINUTES of the ASSOCIATION,

On Monday Evening the Meſſengers being met, ſome Time was ſpent in Prayer; the Letters from the Churches

Churches read; and when Minutes were taken for the Circular Letter, our *Brother Haydon* was desired to draw it up.

The public Meeting on Tuesday, was opened by *Brother Reynolds*; *Brother Turner* proceeded in Prayer; *Brother Butterworth* preached from *Jer.* xvii. 9. *Brother Knight* then prayed, and *Brother Poynting* preached from *Psalm* lxxxix. 15. and *Brother Jones* concluded in Prayer.

The next Morning the Circular Letter was read and approved, and *Brother Overbury* closed the Solemnity with Prayer.

The next Association to be at *Birmingham*, to meet on Monday Evening, Messrs. *Beddome* and *Ash* to preach, and in Case of Failure Mr. *Haydon*.

Put up at the *Castle*.

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